The wild controversy about social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and Myspace invading privacy, legal, and security issues is in an uproar. With sites like these leaking email addresses and other personal information it is becoming a huge issue. If you thought Facebook was your personal playground, think again. Play the most popular games, and your personal information - and in some cases, your list of friends - is sent to app-makers and their allies in the advertising and data-gathering trades.

The problem may bother the tens of millions of regular players of FarmVille and Mafia Wars, to name two popular games that figure in the problem. It should trouble the rest of the social-networking site's 500 million users, who will wonder where they stand. There's also a broader, Internet-wide issue: just how private is life in a digital age, when personal information is siphoned off by firms watching every key stroke? But it's not the first time that the firm has stumbled on the issue of promised privacy. In May it rewrote the rules to let users lock down more personal details. The new disclosures show that it's still possible for softwaremakers - invited in by Facebook to keep users happy with games and services - to cart off personal information and share the results.

The practice isn't new. Visit a website, ask a question or order a product and you can expect spam and ads that reflect your tastes and interests. With Facebook, there's a degree shift: a website that promises privacy and personal choice isn't following through. App-makers are slipping under this pledge and then sharing the results.

When you send a message by e-mail, the message is broken into packets and the packets are sent out over the Internet. The number of packets depends on the size of the message. Each message has the Internet address of the sender (your address) and the address of the recipient. Packets from a single message may take different routes to the destination, or may take different routes at different times. This works well for the Internet and for you since packets are generally sent through the best path depending on the traffic load on the Internet, the path doesn't depend on certain systems being in operation, and all you have to give is the address of the destination. The packets making up an e-mail message may pass through several different systems before reaching their destination. This means there may be some places between you and the destination where the packets could be intercepted and examined. Whatever the cause, it needs an answer. Facebook and other networking sites need to follow through on providing privacy in the online world the firms have created.

It is important for the classroom teacher to know about this issue because this is the same issues with a lot of other sites, maybe even wikis and blogs. It does not matter if the issue is dealing with social networks or podcast, it is an issue dealing with technology and technology is something that all of our students are involved in. In the future using learning tools such as wikis where useful information is shared this too could become an issue. It is important that we teach our students the rules of privacy when it comes to the internet.

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